

# Against Robustness

## Introduction

Many theorists have modalized selected social and ethical concepts. They hold that

*Robustness.* Some normative goods hold in light of the satisfaction of some conditions in possible worlds, not merely in terms of (or holding fixed) the conditions at the actual world.

“Goods” is meant to be an ontologically neutral term which may include properties, relations, actions, attitudes, virtues, components of well-being, etc. We can distinguish possible worlds from potential future states of the *actual* world, future states which either are or are believed to actual. One way to distinguish between possible worlds from potential future states of the actual world assumes some form of determinism—the totality of the natural laws together with a given state of the world determines the evolution of that world. Under this assumption, non-actual possible worlds are worlds with either different natural laws or different histories compared to the actual world (i.e. different contingent features) whereas future states of the actual world are deterministic (or indeterministic) evolutions of the current state of the actual world subject to the totality of (the actual) natural laws.<sup>1</sup> For the sake of argument, I grant these theorists this general possible worlds language and any ontological assumptions required thereof.

Furthermore, these theorists tend to hold that

*Value of Robustness.* Robustness helps to explain the value of the good in question.

This matters because, for these theorists, the value of the good at the actual world is (at least partially) explained by reference to possible worlds. If the good only obtains in the actual world, then, according to Value of Robustness, it would be less valuable. In contrast, the robust version of that

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<sup>1</sup> This interpretation fits with usual way possible worlds are discussed, whereby possible worlds include the entire history and future of the world; temporal or spatial sections of worlds are *states* or *time-slices* or *outcomes of the world*, not worlds themselves.

good, which requires some conditions are met at other possible worlds (or at more possible worlds), is of greater value. Call the theorists who hold Robustness and Value of Robustness *Robustness theorists*.

For instance, one might think that the goods involved in love are (or should be) robust by meeting some threshold of provision across various possible worlds.<sup>2</sup> We could say that the best forms of love would be provided even if things had been different in various ways (perhaps, say, if the two women had met in different circumstances or if they had different hobbies than their actual ones). In the case of Pettit, we might even make the stronger claim that if the love is not sufficiently robust in this manner—if the conditions are not met in enough possible worlds—we cannot say that there is love at all.<sup>3</sup> For some theorists for these stronger claims, the good does not even *exist* in the actual world if it is not robust. In cases with weaker claims, the value of the good at the actual world is improved by being made more robust.

My contention in this essay is that Robustness may be more of a trap than a solution to the explication of complex moral goods; in particular, that appeal to provision of goods in merely possible worlds—compared, for instance, to potential future states of the actual world—is doubly problematic. In particular, there are two systematic issues that occur with theories involving robust goods: (1) difficulties in disambiguating across, and adjudicating value within, possible worlds and (2) comparing the value of changes in possible worlds with changes in the actual world. I will argue that, in light of these problems, across a variety of Robustness theories, we should reject Robustness and

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<sup>2</sup> I assume that robustness is gradable and that every good or action is robust to at least *some* changes or to *some* close possible worlds. So, for instance, every action that I have in fact taken is robust to switching the apartments of families who I have never met that live across the street from my house. If this is right, then the question is whether a good is more or less robust, not whether it is robust or non-robust. For simplicity, I do not mention this caveat and call *more* robust goods ‘robust’ and *less* robust goods ‘non-robust’ throughout but these should be taken to be elliptical for the comparative readings I intend.

<sup>3</sup> For this reason, when I write a “(less or non-) robust good”, this corresponds to what Pettit calls a “thin good” and when I write a “(more) robust good”, this corresponds to what Pettit thinks is the “rich good” (or even the good simpliciter). In other words, he thinks goods of the relevant sort are demanding in a robust manner. Technically, what I call a “non-robust good” is, for some robustness theorists, thus not really the good at all. However, apart from further discussion in the conclusion, this difference is meant to be merely terminological. This is somewhat complicated because, as mentioned above, all in this debate agree that all goods are provided robustly to *at least some minimal* degree.

instead privilege actual value in a lexical manner. This will involve explaining the appeal of Robustness, introducing several accounts, systematically distinguishing between different types of robustness, and arguing that all of them face significant—and, in my opinion, decisive—theoretical costs.

If these arguments are successful, there are claims Robustness theorists can retreat to. For instance, they can claim that the real value is contained in the *grounds* of these robust goods, e.g. the dispositions or patterns that give rise to these goods.<sup>4</sup> Since these grounds are actual, this may not conflict with my claims. Furthermore, those grounds may also actually help by guaranteeing results across potential future states of the *actual* world. But doing so removes the appeal to possible worlds and modality that I think makes Robustness theories interestingly distinct. I will conclude with some thoughts on these implications.

## Modal No-Difference

It is worth dispensing with one worry which is likely to arise immediately, which is that there is no way to affect the provision of the good in merely possible worlds from the world in which one finds oneself. I am happy to grant to robustness theorists the claim that we can make modal differences *arguendo*, but it is also worth considering reasons for taking this claim to be correct.

There are two ways of making a difference in a possible worlds framework. The first way is that one changes which worlds exist, i.e. by destroying or creating possible worlds. While a consistent interpretation, this seems to suggest modal abilities which would be quite powerful or mysterious. However, some Everett interpretations of quantum mechanics might support this type of difference making. The second way is that one changes the accessibility relations between worlds, i.e. by reordering possible worlds, standardly by changing which worlds are most similar to or like the actual

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<sup>4</sup> Thanks to [blinded] for suggesting this line on behalf of the Robustness theorist.

world.<sup>5</sup> Note that this second way can apply regardless of whether we are considering merely possible worlds or future states of the actual world. I will take it that this way is what robustness theorists have in mind.

In this latter way, by changing the present, you change which worlds are most similar to the actual world. For instance, if you decide to spend a lot of time with an individual, there are more or closer possible worlds which are similar to or accessible from the actual world where you bestow the goods of friendship upon that individual. We can imagine that you provide the same goods of friendship upon that individual in the *actual* world, and consider the changes that occur only in other possible worlds. In other words, we can assume you spend a lot of time with the individual and are friendly to them in the actual world (whereupon there will be more or closer possible worlds where you are also friendly to them, making for a more robust provision of friendship) or you choose to spend less time with the individual and are still friendly to them in the actual world (whereupon there will be fewer or farther possible worlds where you are also friendly to them, making for a less robust provision of friendship). In this manner, the actual way you are friendly is not changed, but your actual actions change how many or how close merely possible worlds include you(r counterpart) also being friendly. Those worlds may already have some type of ontological status, but through your actions they are reordered in terms of their closeness to the actual world.

This is the sense of modal difference which I take to be implicit for the modal robustness; assuming there is some choice in ways one can offer a good, one can offer it in ways that will fix which worlds are compatible with those offerings, either in terms of having more compatible futures but also similar histories. More generally, one can internally or externally commit oneself to future courses of action in ways that are robust across different possible futures, but also across possible worlds where counterparts of you have made similar commitments, non-actual worlds with histories that are incompatible with the history of the actual world.

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<sup>5</sup> Technically, the latter would require that we take our possible worlds framework to have weaker relations than S5, which makes all possible worlds accessible to every world. Similarity relations, for instance, are weaker relations than governed by S5.

Another way of framing this is that there might be goods which are more robust and less robust. If we hold fixed the provision of those goods at the actual world, and *only* compare variations in their provision across possible worlds, they will only differ in robustness in my sense. Theoretically, then, we can avoid the questions of to what extent the provisioning in the actual world occurs (and any importance thereof) and compare the goods purely in terms of their provisioning in merely possible worlds.

One could object to this other way of thinking about modal difference by holding that, if we hold fixed the provision of the goods at the actual world, there *are* no variations in their provision across possible worlds. In Pettit's terms, we hold the thin good (the actual provision) fixed while varying its thickness (its robustness or the extent of its possible provision). While remaining agnostic on this question for our purposes, it is worth responding that if this is the case then the robustness theories may lose any claims to action-guidingness. There would be no reason to seek out or provision goods on the basis of their robustness if we cannot provide them in more or less robust ways, modulo actual provision. While I disagree in that I think we can take actions which would make provision of those goods more robust (as suggested above), this is meant to also demonstrate an independent cost to the claim that we cannot vary the robustness of the provision of goods. This would not show that Robustness is false; it would just make it less of the normative or action-guiding claim that I believe it is intended to be.

## Two Theories

Before examining them in depth, let us begin by sketching two recent examples of Robustness theorists.

First, Jonathan Herington (2012, 2013, 2017) modalizes security<sup>6</sup>, holding that an actual agent is secure just in case more of the agents' (future) counterparts enjoy their ability to access basic

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<sup>6</sup> Herington takes there to be several senses of security, some of which I have no objection to and which are unrelated to Robustness—the account of fact-relative security discussed herein is his boldest and most interesting proposal.

goods—abstracting away, for instance, from whether the agents' *actual* future self enjoys the basic good. So actual security is gained by (partially) appealing to merely possible counterparts. Herington thinks that the security of the goods is normatively valuable above and beyond actual enjoyment of the good, so the good he is modalizing is security.

Second, Philip Pettit (2015) modalizes several goods including attachment, virtue, and respect. In each case, the point is that the good is more valuable (and, in his bolder claims, *only* valuable) when it is based on a stable disposition that applies over a wide variety of possible worlds. In earlier work, he discusses political non-domination, where this robust concept requires not only that a leader (actually) does not interfere but would (counterfactually) not interfere were circumstances like her preferences or values different.

Pettit (2015, Ch. 4) points out that, by considering these goods across *possible* worlds and not across the likelihood in the *actual* world, he opens himself to the criticism that his account protects those goods in the sense that they are robust, but that this robustness may be costly in the actual world. My main criticism lies exactly on these lines; there are real-world costs to generating robust goods and that, once this is understood, it is difficult to determine why we should spend real world goods to gain merely possible goods (which is of course what the robustness of goods signifies).

The problem I propose to consider is the following. Let us grant this possible worlds framework. Let us suppose that we are considering bringing a good into the actual world and we can do so in (relatively) robust or (relatively) non-robust forms. Let us grant that these goods would differ in some ways in the actual world—more particularly, that in this context making changes at the actual world has *both* actual and modal implications. How should we decide between providing robust and non-robust forms of those goods? The intuitive and obvious answer—and the answer that I believe leads theorists to endorse Robustness—is we should bring about the robust forms. In contrast, I'm going to argue that, in most if not all cases it may be that we should bring the non-robust goods into the actual world. This is because it is plausible that the more robust a good, the more costly it may be to

bring it about in the actual world and, I argue, actual costs are more important than merely possible gains.

One immediate point is terminological. Some robustness theorists call the robustness gains in value which arise *in light of* merely possible gains *actual* value. When I say merely possible value, I mean to call attention to the fact that the only changes are in levels of robustness, not changes in the actual world—so I mean the same thing these theorists may call actual value. Again, to illustrate, consider someone who is helping you move. They can (form the intention or disposition to) help you under many different circumstances (robustly) or under only a few (non-robustly). Let us hold fixed that, at the actual world, they wake up feeling like being friendly and helpful and the weather is good and they are feeling strong—i.e. circumstances are ripe for helping you move—and they do indeed help. The question is how valuable the robustly provided good of friendship is compared to a non-robustly provided good. We can call the robust good an actual gain or not, but by my emphasis on the differences being in merely possible circumstances, it is easier to avoid conflating those differences from the *actual* provision of the good—provision we hold fixed.<sup>7</sup>

## Herington's Robust Security

The claim that Herington (2017) makes is that fact-relative security, or not being objectively risked, is (actually) valuable.<sup>8</sup> Security obtains (at the actual world) in light of not having one's basic goods put at risk. Fact-relative security means that one's goods are *factually* put at risk, i.e. regardless of one's beliefs or evidence.<sup>9</sup> The robust good in question here is security. Even if one is not actually harmed, or if we fix the harm in the actual world, if there are nearby possible worlds where one's goods are lost, then this is sufficient to contribute to *actual* insecurity, damaging one's well-being in the actual world. Herington says it is possible that this can be explained in terms of preference satisfaction,

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, we are not holding the intentions or the dispositions fixed! I will return to that point in the conclusion, but (at least *prima facie*) the *intentions* to be friendly are not what we value—we value actual friendly behaviour.

<sup>8</sup> The next several paragraphs are based on arguments made in [blinded].

<sup>9</sup> Fact-relative security is therefore often contrasted with belief-relative security, which refers to one's *beliefs* that one's goods are at risk which may or may not coincide with whether one's goods are *factually* put at risk (or evidence-relative security, where the body of evidence available to one supports that one's goods are at risk).

since some might have preferences that our goods are not put at risk—even if they are not actually lost but only lost in possible worlds. However, he admits that this is somewhat unsatisfying or unconvincing. I agree; it would be odd for people to have intrinsic preferences over potential states of affairs that they never learn about (fact-relative, not belief-relative) *and* which never eventuate (they are in merely possible worlds, not in the actual world).

Herington then takes a bolder approach, suggesting that we can appeal to distributional value in preventing insecurity. However, this distribution is not over people in the actual world—we are talking about mere risking which does not eventuate in actual negative outcomes. He writes that these are the cases where “the well-being of an individual is diminished by insecurity even if they are never aware of the risks and the relevant harms never materialize” (Herington 2017, 190). Instead, the distribution is over the well-being of possible persons, or members of different possible worlds.<sup>10</sup> Herington’s argument is that prioritarianism gives us reason to privilege the well-being of people who are less well-off, even merely possible people. So instead of determining the distribution among those who exist (including, perhaps, those who will exist), Herington’s maximization is over people who *could* exist. In other words, instead of distributing between actual people, we take the morally relevant population to be the set of both actual and possible people. This links to security because his conception of security is modal; even if one enjoys a (basic) good in the actual world regardless of whether it is secure or not, if it is secure then one or one’s counterparts enjoy it in many accessible possible worlds.

The intuition seems to be that, if one’s future counterparts are able to enjoy a good, one (in the actual world) is thereby made more secure. Talk of transworld identity is highly vexing (Loux 1979); however, let us put the metaphysics aside and grant Herington that we can make sense of security for actual people in terms of the ability of counterparts to enjoy goods.

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<sup>10</sup> Unlike Smith and Pettit, there is evidence that Herington is interested in future possible states of the actual world (Herington 2012, 2013). This difference is not germane to the arguments developed here.

I take there to be an important objection to this kind of transworld maximization. Furthermore, although Herington exemplifies transworld maximization, I will argue that this objection generalises to other Robustness theories. The important point is that, although Herington wants to increase goods available to merely possible people, this means increasing the security of actual people and the security of actual people requires actual resources. This is most easily recognised by considering the policy implication he draws from his position; we should improve people's (actual) security by purchasing insurance even if, per impossibile, we knew that insurance would not be required (Herington 2017). This does mean actual resources are lost; after all, insurance that does not pay out costs actual money. Furthermore, if insurance is not purchased, this money could be used to finance consumption in the real world. In this manner, on Herington's view, if an individual wants to secure some object, this requires that she gets to enjoy the object in (nearby) possible worlds. Fix that in the actual world the object will not be lost (say, burned in a fire), but that in many close possible worlds it would be. How could the individual guarantee that it is not lost or that she gets a suitable replacement? A natural way to do so is to insure the object against contingencies like fire. The purpose of insuring the object is that, in possible worlds which are similar with respect to this object's being insured, there are far more instances where she gets to enjoy the object (or perhaps a suitable replacement provided by the insurance company). However, this insurance is not without cost; in the actual world, she has to pay for insurance and—as we assumed—in the actual world her object, while threatened, is never actually taken or destroyed regardless of the insurance. So in the actual world, her payment for insurance costs resources to her without any actual gain. But these are actual resources. Of course, she may not know this, but we are evaluating the *value* of her (in)security; we are not here addressing deontological questions. In the actual world, she is unable to use the funds paid for insurance to do other things she would like to do. In short, the costs in the actual world, which can be used to provide the robust good (i.e. security), are traded off against gains in (merely) possible worlds.

The problem is even more severe than it might first appear. Suppose that one were concerned about the risk to basic goods that may befall counterparts of ours in possible worlds in the prioritarian manner that Herington advocates; how would we compare these merely possible harms to actual harms? After all, there are far more possible people to worry about than actual people and if we spend resources making sure that possible people live as well as possible (or at least live a sufficiently good (possible) life), that would require huge costs to actual people. Whatever discount for possibility (or degrees of similarity) we might argue for, the quantity of possible people would make it very unlikely that they would not swamp the demands of actual people. Even if we wanted to secure goods for some relatively small number of possible people, that would entail costs for actual people. Would we really rather they were made secure in the sense that their merely possible counterparts lived satisfactorily as opposed to their actually having better lives in the real world?

We can consider three categories of discounting: none, some and full. If we have no discounting of possible people relative to the actual world, as suggested above we will face potential overdemandingness. If we have some, fixed or even non-fixed, level of discounting, I believe that we would still end up swamped by the demands of merely possible people and some type of overdemandingness. After all, there are so many merely possible people, it would be difficult to see how they could not swamp the value of actual people. More importantly, one would need a metric or at least a proxy for how one could operationalize the discounting. For instance, an intuitive idea is that you would want to count merely possible worlds which are closer more than ones which are further away. This could be operationalized using a familiar metric like Lewis' similarity relations, for which—with some complex stipulations—we have an ordering of possible worlds. However, even if you *entirely* discount the possible worlds which are sufficiently far away, I believe that the worlds which are closest are uncountably many and would, once again, swamp the demands of actual people. This overdemandingness problem is unfortunately, if you'll excuse me, robust.

I believe that these considerations suggest we should lexically prioritize actual people or, in other words, completely discount all the claims of merely possible people, but I will postpone this claim until we have considered a more complex case, Pettit's modal goods.

## **Pettit's Robust Goods**

In the case of Pettit, the virtues are maintained in worlds which have "modest changes retaining suitable priming and support" (2015: 108). The idea here is that really ("thickly") possessing the virtuous good require application in different worlds. In fact, he holds that we only value the provision of these goods insofar as they "are guaranteed, or more or less guaranteed, by suitable dispositions that are grounded in the nature—albeit perhaps the socially conditioned nature—of the providers" (109).<sup>11</sup>

The question once again is whether, given the possibility of choosing, to provide modally satisfying robust goods over (merely) actual goods. There are two primary possibilities here. It could be that possible worlds differ in terms of the agents themselves (e.g. their histories) or that they differ in terms of non-agential states (e.g. the goods or luck they find themselves enjoying as a result of their actions). Broadly speaking, we can take the former case to be a denial of origins essentialism—the view that one's identity is fixed by origins—since the counterparts can have different histories and the latter to be intuitively supported by origins essentialism.

In case the possible worlds differ in terms of the agents themselves, there is the challenge of specifying which agents are the appropriate counterparts of actual individuals. As mentioned before, this is challenging (Loux 1979). It has to be done on this account because in determining how many possible worlds you are ranging over, which agent has the appropriate dispositions is relevant to determining whether the application conditions become satisfied. This may be especially challenging because you have to hold fixed the dispositions in this case so it's not clear when someone with your

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<sup>11</sup> This may require that what the virtues are is insensitive to the actual society or world within which you live. That would be a very strong version of virtue ethics, which is often taken to be highly contextual. I grant him this point, since it is unrelated to my primary critiques.

dispositions counts as you (the 'provider of the good') or not. In other words, you are simultaneously both trying to find your counterparts and the counterparts who have the same dispositions (the latter of which may be quite different from you in terms of, for instance, their histories). This is another instance of the common challenge of identifying the appropriate counterparts.

However, there's a deeper worry here, which again relates to increasing the provision modally. The problem is that making sure the agents' dispositions would be stable in other possible worlds is (actually) extra work for (actual) agents, who would have to somehow insure that they act similarly in many situations. This is structurally similar to the insurance case from Herington. So, for instance, one might think that forming a disposition is not psychologically effortless, and, intuitively, forming a strong or robust disposition is more work than forming a weak or non-robust disposition. For instance, one might be a friend in a more or less robust way---this would change which worlds are sufficiently similar to the actual world. More precisely, you can be a friend by thinking "I really want to be this person's friend and, say, help them in lots of circumstances (even ones that could not happen or will not happen)" or by thinking "It would be good to be this person's friend, but the relationship is not a big deal for me". You could psychologically (internally) or socially (externally) commit to making the relationship robust. For instance, this could be achieved through publicly committing to this person (e.g. when out with friends, promising "I'll be there for you if you go through something like that again").

The possible worlds which are accessible to the actual world would be different if you had one intention rather than the other. We would expect that the robust disposition would guarantee that (more or closer) possible worlds would involve providing that friendship. But, like the insurance case with transworld maximization, there would be actual costs. By prioritizing this friendship in the actual world, this means that you are not prioritizing other things (perhaps other friends, or perhaps other things requiring social or psychological effort). This is compatible with the idea that the costs do not *feel* costly; you may well enjoy providing the goods of friendship. However, they will displace other potential uses of your time and psychological effort and in that sense there are *opportunity* costs.

Furthermore, this is consistent with holding fixed that you do offer the goods of friendship in the actual world, just varying the commitment to do so in outcomes that do not actually occur. This is, perhaps, a less obvious way than the Herington case in which making things more robust in terms of possible worlds would be costly in the actual world. After all, for instance, you can only be best friends with some finite number of people. You can only be there to support a finite number of people. More robustly providing the good of friendship has more (actual) temporal, psychological, and social costs. One may take those costs to be worth it, but my view is that the fact that the benefits do not actually occur means that they should not be valued in the actual world. A more concessive view would be that they should be discounted in value in the actual world. These two views correspond to strong or weak forms of prioritization, respectively.

## Claiming Priority of the Actual

We can generalize the conclusions we have drawn from considering the various types of Robustness theorists considered to the position that we should prioritize actual people with a strong or a weak form of interworld value comparison:

*Lexical Priority of the Actual (Strong).* In interworld aggregation, value at the actual world is lexically prior to value at merely possible worlds.

*Priority of the Actual (Weak).* In interworld aggregation, value at the actual world has some type of priority compared with value at merely possible worlds.

In these forms, *Lexical Priority of the Actual (Strong)* implies *Priority of the Actual (Weak)* but not the converse. I have indicated the reasons that weak priority of the actual is difficult to sustain. In particular, the kind of worries about demandingness that might lead one to adopt some type of priority of the actual are not properly met by mere priority of the actual due to the uncountably many merely possible worlds there are.

It is also worth reiterating that some authors hold that there is value at the *actual* world in light of changes at merely possible worlds. So, for instance, even though (say) I can provision you a given good at the actual world either more or less robustly, these Robustness theorists would hold that the more robust provision is more valuable at the *actual* world (alternatively, they might say that it is only a good of that type if it *is* sufficiently robust). They might therefore reject these principles or claim that they do not actually apply in the context of their favoured theories of Robustness.

Earlier, I indicated that my use of the term ‘merely possible’ is terminological, in that it was meant to draw attention to cases where the actual provision is fixed but the possible outcomes were varied. However, a stronger defence of these priority claims may be mounted.

The claim these theorists would be advancing is that, *merely* in light of changes in possible worlds and, in turn, changes in the robustness of goods, the actual value of these goods differ. This is an odd claim in a similar manner to the claim that there is value which accrues to, say, you in the actual world merely in light of successes of (your) fictional counterparts in merely *fictional* worlds. The structure of the case is the same; fictional worlds are causally isolated from the actual world as merely possible worlds are causally isolated from the actual world (indeed, some theorists think that fictional worlds are a subset of the possible worlds). I would grant that the fictional successes would be sufficient for *fictional* value, but not for actual value. Similarly, I would grant that increased robustness cashed out in increases in more goods being provisioned at merely possible worlds to possible counterparts to be sufficient for (increased) *possible* value, but not for actual value. We could accurately say you are made *possibly* better off or you are made *fictionally* better off but these claims seem significantly different enough from being *actually* better off that it is hard to see how the latter is improved by either of the former.

## Conclusion and Implications

When thinking intuitively about modal robustness, we may easily be misled into thinking that robustness is a positive characteristic for goods to have. However, this is often done without

considering what the actual costs of making or providing more robust goods are. Once we see can be interworld trade-offs, the intuitive force of the Value of Robustness is less compelling. Indeed, we can even debunk part of the intuitive force that robustness is a positive characteristic once we emphasise the distinction between potential (future) states of the actual world and possible worlds proper. Some of the authors in this debate do make this distinction clear, but I think that appeals to modality often tend to tug on the future states of the actual world intuition and transfer it to possible worlds proper without sufficiently flagging this distinction.

What would the implications of accepting these arguments be? The robustness theorist could retreat to the actual *grounds* of the robust provision of goods—for instance, the dispositions which guarantee their modal provision—and say that these grounds are valuable.<sup>12</sup> This would be compatible with *Lexical Priority of the Actual*, since the grounds are themselves actual. While the intuitive instrumental value for the ground would be undermined (the modal provision which is grounded), the robustness theorist could point out that there is another instrumental value for the ground (the provision across potential future states of the actual world). However, both Herington and Pettit are clear that this kind of instrumental value for future states of the actual world is not what they intend. It is possible that Robustness theorists can posit that the grounds are not valuable instrumentally, but *intrinsically*. While I do not have a knockdown objection to such a retreat, I do think it risks fetishizing these grounds. If they are not valuable insofar as they contribute to actual behaviours we want to promote, then their value seems mysterious.

One response to make is that, even if I were to grant the thrust of this claim, the goods may well be different between possible worlds and potential future states of the actual world. For instance, I might know things are not going to happen in the actual world which are entirely possible and would have occurred in very close possible worlds. Therefore, the grounds that would be relevant to the modal and the future evolution situations could come apart.

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<sup>12</sup> In the book, Pettit suggests this alternative.

However, that first response is more concessive than I would like to be. I think that the philosophically important thing is what are the reasons or principles which support normative judgments, not what those judgments are themselves. After all, many of the substantive first-order judgments which apply in the actual world converge under different normative theories; they primarily differ on the reasons or principles which underlie those judgments. If this is the right work of a philosophical theory, then the fact that these kinds of dispositions may both increase robustness in merely possible worlds *and* make it more likely that certain things will occur in the actual world is not relevant. What is relevant is which of these might help *justify* the creation and fostering of these dispositions. Besides the above response that I think these *will* come apart in practice—we know more about actuality than the various possibilities—the arguments here tell us that Value of Robustness is false. It is not in light of robustness in possible worlds that these goods are (or at least may be) valuable; it is in light of the actual world, and our expectations and beliefs about the way the actual world might unfold. Moving the focus to the grounds loses the particularly *modal* appeal that Robustness theories make. While I think that appeal is misguided, it is worth examining in depth why so we can focus on what actually matters—which, if I am right, is what matters, actually.

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